

A Cast of Players

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Part 1-

The Third smiled beneath his mask as the acolytes entered his Troupe's hideout. He was not completely sure how they found it. They had quite thoroughly covered their tracks. He was always so surprised at the humans and their persistence. One would think that a race as short lived as theirs would give up on a task that would take them decades to accomplish. "No matter," he thought. For he had always wished to try this performance. One could only truly accomplish it when one was first taken by surprise. It was an older story many Eldar do not remember it. But The Third thought of himself as a little more learned than most of his kind, even among the Harlequins with whom he traveled. "Welcome!" He proclaimed as the acolytes made it to the center of the room. "I am surprised that you were able to make it all this way Lieutenant," he continued to the now stunned acolytes as they began to take in there surroundings. The realization of their predicament dawning on he faces of the humans. All but the Lieutenant who just stared coolly at the Troupe Master as he continued with his soliloquies. "Now, I know why you are here Lieutenant. You believe I am behind the recent events involving the poor little town of Heleborne. As much as one of my colleges," he said glancing up into the corner where his troupes very own Death Jester, Ulthanesh, sat polishing his gun, "would like to be responsible for the fear being spread. We are not."

Only one acolyte, a techpriest, turned to look at the Death Jester. The mask on the Jester slowly looking up at the young techpriest meeting his eyes. He smiled to himself as he thought of a fun little joke to play while The Third continued his little rant about some such nonsense about duty or honor or both... Probably both. He was such a light. Ulthanesh preferred his humor to be a bit more dark. So he tossed the rag he was using to polish his Shrieker Cannon at the techpriest. As it sank between he two of them he knew he had only a moment. Ulthanesh raised his cannon as the rag broke the techpriest's view of him. The techriest stunned look almost made the Jester laugh. Almost. He knew better than ruining this moment with too much unwanted attention. The techpriest tapped the feral looking human next to him and pointed towards the the Jester, looking away for just a moment. "And scene," he thought replacing his cannon to his lap as he began polishing it again. When the two humans looked his way. The feral one seemed to be chuckling at the techpriest's apparent loss of nerve. Ulthanesh began humming to himself again.

"I truly am sorry that your journey must end here," The Third's soliloquies coming to an end just as in the story. The Lieutenant's silence perfectly portraying the Lucky Fool he did not even realize he represented, "for you could have solved the problems in the town yourself had you only kept your distance from your betters. But now we must be off. There is work to be done." As he finished his trusty Shadowseer, Elthenesh, unleashed the colorful banners and bright clothes that hung from the ceilings. Of course to the humans it would appear as thought they came out of no ware. It must have been a beautiful sight to behold. Quickly The Third jumped to his next position as he did the first shot rang.

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Lieutenant Coleson. An up and coming Acolyte who had already attained a high standing with his Inquisitor was stunned as the speech ended in a flurry of color a bright green cloth waved in front of him where once the despicable Eldar, who seemed to be wearing his Inquisitor's face, was just standing. He quickly reached out, his hand becoming rapped in the fabric as he pushed it forward hoping to snare the treacherous Eldar in his grasp. But as his arm reached the limit of his reach he quickly realized that would be impossible. But where could the foul xeno gone? The room was a perfect circle with only one level. Wasn't it? He quickly grasped the cloth as his men opened fire in all directions aiming where they last remember seeing a xeno before the storm of color. The thunder of bolter fire, the cool hiss of las weaponry, and the soft pop of auto guns ripped the storm of colors apart. Yet still no cries of dying xenos came. Curious "Hold your fire," he bellowed over the myriad of weapons tossing the cloth in his hand to the side. His ears ringing as the last of his fellow acolytes ceased firing. "Be still," He began, "hold your ground circular formation." The acolytes forming a tight circle each one trying desperately to see through the falling colors, to be the first to claim one of the xenos they believed to be just out of their field of vision. The techpriest, Mordikai, positioned directly behind him, uttered something to his precious Omnisiah. The Feral one, Driver, sniffed the air. The man to his right, Rookie, clutched his halberd tightly leveling it straight ahead his gaze hard. They all stood searching in their own unique ways. Rookie cried out first. Raising his halberd. Too slow. He fell before the strange weapon the Eldar had strapped to its wrist. Then every one was shouting. The clanging of metal indicated that Drive had engaged one of the xenos. Though he looked desperate. A thunderous crash sounded as Mordikai's hammer barely missed one of the Eldar. He looked forward and saw the speaker from earlier land before him and slowly draw his blade. Coleson glared at him and readied his own.

The humans wouldn't appreciate the art in all of this. The Third new it even before the guns sounded off. Their voices causing a terrible song. They stopped and the Lieutenant called to the others. "Hold your fire! Be still, hold your ground circle formation." Oh if only the acolyte new how perfectly he followed the script running through his mind. Such a tragedy that they would never be able to understand the art they were helping to create. No matter the last banners were about to hit the ground. As the last banner finished its descent the moment of silence was shattered by one of the acolytes as he cried out raising his halberd. Too slow. One of his players plunged her Kiss into the man's neck. He cried for but a second as his insides quickly turned to a mixture of ground up bones and liquefied organs and muscles. His flesh seeming to melt into his armor his insides nothing more than soup unable to hold up his skin. As the armor clattered to the floor the violent second act of the play began. A beautiful display of colors dancing about as the holo-fields of his players flickered to life accompanied by the percussion of swords clashed and a hammer thundered its own beat. "Enter the wise leader," he whispered to himself dropping from his perch to face the Lieutenant. "I truly am sorry Lieutenant," he said just loud enough for the human to hear him, slowly drawing his power sword. "Me too," he responded. With a flurry of motion troupe master dodged the human's attacks. With a flick of his wrist he cut clean through the armor protecting the man's thigh his powerblade crackling to life just as it touched the

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plate that the man thought would protect him. Just as easily as it cut through the armor it too cut through the man's thigh, his hamstring ripping open to the bone, blood spewing all over the banners littering the floor. The man began to cry out but just as his scream began to escape his lips, The Third slit his throat cutting it off before the human could shame himself too much. With the man falling he stepped past him walking through the carnage his troupe was causing, he idly wonder what each of the humans saw when they looked upon his mask.

The ferral one seemed to be doing well. Though Siidhe always did enjoy playing with his victims, he would soon follow the Death Jester's path. Darkness called to him and he loved the idea of playing the ultimate claimer of all. Heroes and villains would always fall to Death. "I really should focus the others may think I am loosing my touch," Siidhe thought. With a flourish he disarmed the man before him.

Driver was dumbfounded. How could this small thing disarm him? He was Driver was he not? He earned his title-name by driving off a whole group of Crootox single-handedly. He was Driver the pride of his tribe uplifted by the Imperium to lend his strength to their ranks! Now he stood unarmed as the small creature before him flicked its wrist opening up his gut. He fell to his knees crying out in pain trying to hold his guts in. The... thing in front of him it's face was changing. The once blank mask began to fashion itself after one of his tribes old idols. No. Those were not real. The Emperor he was his god now not that old relic. "No," he sputter out as blood began filling his lungs. He began coughing it up. "No no no no! You are not real... you are a dead thing... nothing more," he cried out between coughs of bloods. "Just like your Emperor," the cruel unmoving mouth whispered back. He tried to retaliate but his head was swimming. Blackness filling his vision.

Mordikai couldn't believe it he was surrounded and alone. "The Omnisiah will," he began in his respirator augmented voice. But before he could finish his head was removed in a flourish of steel.

As the last one fell The Third looked at his troupe. "We must move quickly. The local cult is probably well aware that the Inquisition has sent someone here and will no doubt hasten their plans to summon their vile lord." "How do we respond," asked someone from the darkest corner. Pride, the Solitaire. "We will have the Heroes take the stage. As is tradition in such a tale." A soft chuckle from Pride, "Come Eldanesh! Come Ulthanesh! Your Pride will drive you to glory!" With that the three heroes departed The Third new they could handle it and began preparing his troupe to depart. They had lingered long enough.

Part 2-

The three heroes entered the small town of Heleborne. As they past the first group of small buildings they each split heading toward there separate staging grounds. Eldanesh the Shadowseer began walking straight forward sensing the tides of the warp they called to her. She knew they would not lie.

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Ulthanesh took to the rooftops to the left humming softly to himself. Their flat ground perfect for his stunts though they did not allow for much flare.

Pride sprinted forward past the Shadowseer then vaulted up to the higher buildings. He ran forward feeling his enemies call. Korne was growing in strength here he could feel it. He jumped from rooftop to rooftop faster and more agile than any other Eldar could hope to do. He was Pride an aspect of She-Who-Thirsts guiding these heroes to their destiny, if only to fuel himself. He landed softly on a rooftop above a large square where cultists chanted around a massive pyre. He could smell the sick stench of burning meat as the humans tossed their own defeated men into the fire. Korne reveled in their sacrifice Pride could sense it. "I know your in position," Pride whispered to his companions knowing they could hear his every word as clearly as though they were standing next to each other, "why have you not taken the shot?"

"You cannot rush my art," Ulthanesh responded in his own sing-song whisper not wanting to loose the tune he was humming.

"Be quick Eldanesh is almost in position. It would be a shame if she were able to kill more of them than you," Pride said coolly knowing it should cause the Death Jester to strike.

"You cannot fool me, Pride. But you are right time is wasting," the Jester replied still in his own musical tone.

Just then the pyre erupted into a minor warp rift. It shifted in impossible shapes and dimensions. Pride just smiled beneath his mask. Time to feed.

Eldanesh walked calmly towards the now roiling warp rift. "Great," she thought. No one would see her frustration though her face was ever shifting like the rift itself. The cultist were chanting louder now thanks to the arrival of the rift. They were utterly enthralled by it. Staring into its ever shifting form waiting for their prize. Eldanesh calmly leveled her shuriken pistol at the nearest cultist. With a twitch of her finger his head was nearly sheared from his body as the flat razor sharp disk ripped through the mans neck. The blood flowed from the wound some hitting the ground most entering the rift. Damn that will make this harder. The humming she had until now been able to ignore grew a little louder. He would get excited about that. Foolish Ulthanesh. She quickly fired of two more rounds from her pistol. Two more cultist hit the ground blood flowing from the holes carved through their backs. The others began to take notice.

"Here we go," Pride whispered into her ear.

She pointed her staff forward unleashing a torrent of eldritch energy into two cultists as they charged toward her. They both collapsed their eyes hollowed out by the power. "Best be careful," teased Ulthanesh from his perch, "It would be a shame if you were to pull something worse out of that rift."

She knew that she had more experience than anyone in their troupe when it came to the risks of using the warp. "Can't worry about that now," she thought. Slamming her staff into the ground throwing a small group of charging cultist screaming unprotected into the Warp. She chuckled at the thought of helping them get closer to their dark god than they could have ever hoped for. She needed to stop spending time with Ulthanesh he was rubbing off on her.

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"That was masterfully done," Ultanesh chuckled out as if on queue, "I couldn't have done that better if I wanted to."
Eldanesh smiled despite herself.

Ultanesh hummed his very favorite tune. He always did that in battle. It focused him. Made him much more lethal and of course it annoyed his fellow troupe members, especially the Shadowseer. His target a man standing atop a stage. The cult leader. Not a champion but still important enough. He leveled his Shrieker cannon still humming as he took aim. He had already selected his round, a single shuriken disk impregnated with a vile concoction that would turn the cult leader's insides into a mixture of acid and toxins his weak flesh would be unable to contain it and it would explode across his followers like a plague. The Death Jester loved his job. He fired. His target ruptured just as he knew it would spewing forth the acidic toxin all over the square causing many cultists to collapse their flesh melting off of their bodies their screams cut short as the mixture made it to their lung. Yes He loved his job. He hopped down from his perch and slowly walked toward the square still humming his favorite tune.

"My turn," Pride thought, "but where is the." He was cut off as his target exited the rift. Pride smiled beneath his mask. The daemon a herald of Korne himself exited the portal finally appeased by the amount of bloodshed. Pride was surprised to see some of the cultists still alive eight by his count. How perfect. The daemon surveyed the destruction its hideous mouth curling into a mockery of a smile. Pride loathed this servant of the Dark Gods. More so given its alignment to Khorne. The daemon began to bellow. Its howl would surely summon more of its kind. Pride new he needed to act fast. He launched himself from his perch landing just before the daemon. His embrace cackled to life coating his hand in a powerful field. He shoved his hand deep into the daemons chest removing its vile heart the cursed things bellows cut short by the act. As the daemon began to fade back into the immaterium Pride raised the heart high and squeezed. Its ichor spewing out from it covering his hand.

"I am Pride," bellowed the Solitaire his voice booming like thunder, the very foundations of the buildings around him shaking from its power. "You know who I represent! I see it in your faces. You fear me! I am an aspect of Slaanesh!" He waited letting that sink in. The cultist began to tremble. Some fell to the floor while others tried to stay standing. Pride found too much joy in this and continued. "Which one of you fancies yourself a champion of your god? Step forward now and test your blade against me! Let us see if Khorne really does watch over you." He waited. They all trembled before his gaze. Finally one stirred grabbing his blade from where it had fallen and standing tall. Pride new that look it was galvanized belief in a cause. Zealotry at its finest. Pride just stared at the man as he leveled the blade at him.

"I accept your challenge foul Slaaneshi," he cried out.

"Perfect," answered pride calmly, "Make your move."

With that the cultist ran forward raising his blade. It seemed so slow to Pride. He couldn't believe that humans could operate at all. They were slow and clumsy. The fact that they made it this far has to be the cruelest joke the universe has ever conceived. Even Cegorach, the Laughing god, couldn't have thought up a better one.

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As the man drew closer Pride calmly dropped the daemon's heart. Then he activated his embrace the powerful energy boiling the foul blood coating his hand. Once the human was in range Pride calmly slashed with his embrace shearing the man from left hip to right shoulder. Blood spewed forth from the wound coating a large area in blood as both the halves fell their separate ways. Pride smiled behind his mask. The other cultist began running, in some cases crawling, toward the warp rift. It seemed they would rather be lost to the warp than face the three heroes. Pride just nodded at Ulthanesh who had recently arrived taking up the left flank. The Death Jester lowered his cannon and unleashed a torrent of shuriken disks. The cultists were quickly reduced to bloody chunks as they tried to flee.

Eldanesh holstered her pistol and walked towards the rift. Feeling its the powerful energy beyond it.

"Nice trick with the voice Shadowseer," said Pride from behind her.

"I live for the art of the show," she replied.

Ulthanesh walked up to her humming softly. finally he asked, "Can you close it?"

"I can though it will take time and concentration," she placed a large amount of emphasis on the last two words. To her surprise the Death Jester silenced his humming. "Thank you," she said calmly as she began to work on saving this pathetic human world.